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10 March 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: The Likelihood of Renewed Arab-Israeli Hostilities\*

1. Despite Israel's recent attack on Egyptian Army installations in the Gaza strip, we continue to believe that an early outbreak of large-scale fighting between Israel and Egypt or one or more of the other Arab states is unlikely.

2. We believe that the RCC regime in Egypt almost certainly wishes to avoid a military test of strength with Israel's superior forces, particularly in view of the present strains within the Arab League. The other Arab states along Israel's periphery, all smaller and weaker than Egypt, are probably at least equally anxious to avoid trouble.

3. The Israeli Government, for its part, has demonstrated once again that it is prepared to subject its Arab neighbors to considerable provocation in order to emphasize its determination to protect Israeli interests and to impress the outside world with the need for a final settlement of Israel's relations with its Arab neighbors. Some Israelis, including the influential ex-Prime Minister and present Defense Minister Ben Gurion, almost certainly believe that force is the only way to deal with the Arabs, and many of them would probably welcome a "second round" as a means of ending an unsatisfactory situation in which time appears to be working against Israel. We believe it unlikely, however, that the Israeli Government, particularly under Prime Minister Sharett, would deliberately provoke war with the Arabs. Such a policy would subject Israel not only to various military

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hazards, including the possibility of Tripartite intervention, but also to probable cutting off of US financial support. While the Israelis have presumably been prepared to accept the risks of war inherent in such major raids as those at Qibya and in the Gaza strip, we do not believe that provocation of war was their aim.

4. The chief danger in the present situation is that the Israelis may through miscalculation press the Arabs too far. Egypt and the other Arab states, despite their fundamental unwillingness to risk war, would find it increasingly difficult to remain passive in the face of further Israeli raids, particularly if they were to take place in quick succession. This danger would be intensified if local Israeli military authorities went beyond their instructions, as may have been the case in the Gaza raid. Moreover, the use of fairly sizeable military raiding forces of itself increases the danger that major opposing units might be committed before fighting could be halted.

5. We believe that the chances are less than even that Israel will mount further large-scale raids in the immediate future. The Gaza raid was apparently intended to counteract the cumulative effect on Israeli morale and prestige of a series of unfavorable developments over the last few months, and there is as yet no evidence that it was intended to inaugurate a new and significantly tougher policy. Moreover, at least for the present, the pressures being applied by the US and the UK will probably have a sobering effect on the Israeli Government.

6. Nevertheless, internal pressures for further retaliatory raids will almost certainly well up again. Refugee border crossers will remain a source of irritation and trouble to Israelis in the frontier areas. Moreover, the problems of maintaining Israel's over-all position in the Near East will continue to stimulate frustration and discontent -- a feeling that may be increased by US and UK condemnation of the recent raid. The Gaza raid has done much to counteract popular dissatisfaction within Israel over the meager results of Sharett's efforts to solve Israel's problems primarily through diplomacy. With elections coming up this summer, the government will be under some pressure to adopt a somewhat more aggressive posture.

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